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TITLE: Formative Research Implications for Intervention Design in an HIV Prevention Program for Young African-American Men Who Have Sex with Men in Birmingham, Alabama

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ISSUE: Young African-American men who have sex with mm are at risk for HIV infection. Effective HIV intervention strategies must be able to identify subgroups within larger target populations and develop strategies to reach these subgroups. In addition, those environmental and cultural factors that undermine safer sex practices must be identified so that they can be addressed in the intervention design.

SETTING: Birmingham, Alabama's population of young African-American men who have sex with other men will be the intervention target audience.

PROJECT: The Community Intervention Trials for Youth Program in Birmingham conducted content analysis of 34 qualitative interviews with young African-American men who have sex with other men to understand the subgroups within the target audience and to develop culturally and age-appropriate HIV interventions.

RESULTS: Information was generated regarding the various subgroups within the larger community of black men who have sex with men. Descriptions of the subgroups were developed along with HIV risk behavior profiles, associations of various subgroups with distinct venues, and suggestions on ways to access to each subgroup for targeted HIV prevention interventions. Factors influencing sexual risk-taking behavior included: perception of unprotected oral sex as a lower risk behavior than unprotected anal sex, relationship status, sex partner characteristics, and use of drugs and alcohol with sex. Interviewees indicated condoms were not used with main sex partner, for oral sex, with very handsome or desirable partners, or when intoxicated. Lack of personal hygiene and poor self-esteem were also seen as predictors of unsafe sex.

LESSONS LEARNED: Subgroups of men who have sex with men in the geographic region were separated along racial lines, with black men who have sex with other black men frequenting different avenues than black men who have sex with white men. Intervention design must adjust for those black men who associate primarily with other black men and those who associate primarily with white gay men. Identification with the term "gay" was low, despite MSM behavior. Some venues were also associated with male prostitution and were judged to be dangerous by interviewers, thus making venue-based intervention outreach more difficult for those men who have sex for money or drugs. The target population was also separated by effeminate or masculine public behaviors. Effeminate public behavior was associated with an anal-receptive role during intercourse and willingness to use the term "gay" for self-description while masculine public behavior was associated with the anal insertive role and use of the term "bisexual" or "in the life" for self-description.

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